

**ADM. MIKE MULLEN
CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF**

INTERVIEW

CHARLIE ROSE SHOW

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Charlie Rose:

The president made several speeches around -- you probably were there at the National Defense University.

Michael Mullen:

Yeah, I was.

Charlie Rose:

He said a number of interesting things. One, is we need a less -- essentially, echoed what you've said, or certainly, you two are reading from the same playbook: less militarized foreign policy, and that the military can't do it alone, and that American can't do it alone.

Michael Mullen:

Those are all beliefs I have, and have taken strong positions on certainly in particularly in recent years in these wars. And no matter where I go, even outside Iraq and Afghanistan, it becomes evident to me where there are insurgencies and counter-insurgencies, that the military can only take it so far. And that's certainly true in Iraq, and even as the president announced the recent decision to draw down in Iraq, he spoke very clearly about the need to engage across all of our -- all elements of our national power and the needs of other countries to engage in this time in Iraq, which is still a time that could generate some significant insecurity, yet the overall returns are very positive. True in Afghanistan. As we looked to -- he recently approved an increase in troops there. As we look to doing that, actually, I think governance is probably the most important issue, getting the economy going, in addition to providing security for the people. So there's only so far the military can take it. And then lastly, and he spoke of this today as well as you have indicated, that the issue of militarizing our foreign policy, which is occurred, I think, fairly dramatically over the last decade or so, and that the military carries a big load with respect to that. There are a lot of other things that we're doing, including these two wars, and yet we need to engage, I think, the rest of our government in ways and generate civilian capacity to do these kinds of things.

Charlie Rose:

Something you have said as we look at America: how is the military and the foreign policy different now that you are working for a different president?

Michael Mullen:

Well, I think, I mean clearly the strategic view that President Obama generated with respect to Iraq -- I mean, he's very deliberate about having a strategy that includes all elements of our national power, diplomacy to be very specific about that, but certainly others, and creating that strategy and then making decisions tied to where those strategic objectives --

Charlie Rose:

Is it fair to say there's a stronger emphasis on diplomacy today than there had been in the past?

Michael Mullen:

There's a very strong emphasis on diplomacy here. And Secretary Clinton has spoken of that. He's spoken of that. And I think -- and it also comes at a time, at least in my travels where there are countries all over the world, looking for a hand to see a hand reach out to them. So all of what I see and what I hear is very consistent with what the president has said, and that certainly gets to a melding the military side with the diplomatic side. And from the policy and diplomatic side, I think it needs to lead military efforts.

Charlie Rose:

What questions are you asked? When you talk to the head of the chief of staff in the Army in Pakistan, when you meet with the military in China, when you talk to people, what are they asking you about America?

Michael Mullen:

Right now, we're at a time with a new president and so in my travels and discussions, many are watching and looking to see what President Obama is going to do and his administration's going to do in regions throughout the world. I was -- I traveled last week in South America to Chile, Peru, Colombia and Brazil, and I also ended up in Mexico, and that theme is very much there as well. And I think it represents certainly what I've heard from my European colleagues as well. So they're anxious to know where President Obama is going, where America is going, and the message that we can't do it alone, I think, is a very strong one, and it's very well received. So I get asked about that. And I get asked about policy changes, and some of those are just unknown yet because they're really his decisions, certainly not mine.

Charlie Rose:

The most important, certainly, region of the country, as you have suggested is the broader Middle East. There is a policy review going on about Pakistan, Afghanistan. Where is that? When will we hear it, and what are the questions you will answer?

Michael Mullen:

Back to what I said about the president earlier, he wants a strategic review and a strategy and then decisions to fit into that strategy. And we're just about done. I think it will be done here -- I won't put an exact time on it because it's his to decide when to publish it

and make the decisions that are associated with it. I think it will be done in the next couple of weeks, specifically. And broadly, it addresses as it needs to address the concerns that many of us have expressed over a long period of time, the safe haven in Pakistan, making sure that Afghanistan doesn't provide a capability in the long run or an environment in which Al-Qaeda could return or the Taliban could return, to provide for the stability in that country, to put the country in a position to, in fact, develop its own armed forces, to provide for its own security would be another example, and to get the economy going and to get governance moving in the right direction at all levels in Afghanistan -- national, provincial, as well as the district level. Those are all key points, although I think the strategy will be more comprehensive than just covering those things.

Charlie Rose:

How many troops will it need?

Michael Mullen:

That's to be determined, quite frankly. General McKiernan has asked for about 30 plus thousand troops. The president has approved sending 17, a little over 17,000 of those troops and that will happen over the next few months. 2009 is a very important year but I think in the end it's really going to be the decision of the president how many of that we'll need based on what his strategy is.

Charlie Rose:

How many are coming from Iraq?

Michael Mullen:

Actually, there is a -- a growing detachment, if you will, in terms of available forces based on the troops which are coming out of Iraq. I mean for a long time, if there has been a direct tie, because in fact it was announced last week that we take out two more brigades from Iraq, and so they aren't certainly -- the fact that Iraq is getting better, and we're reducing the number of troops, gives us more flexibility. Yet, the troops are going few, at least in the near term, go up in Afghanistan. So there is still plenty of pressure. And while it is not as strongly tied as it was, there is still a connection between troop levels in Iraq and troop levels in Afghanistan.

Charlie Rose:

I hear you saying that what you need there is a lot of governance, you need a lot of cooperation between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and that's at this core of solving the problem.

Michael Mullen:

Clearly, there is going to have to be civilian capacity generated out of the United States as well as I think our allies in Europe and others who are there to get at the governance piece at automatic three levels as I indicated earlier. And until that happens, the military just isn't going to be enough. This year, I mean we've got elections in Afghanistan in August, and so this year is a really critical year in Afghanistan. That's why providing those troops early is important, so security is satisfactory for free and fair elections. At

the same time, we also have to generate this other capacity as rapidly as we can in many cases this year as well.

Charlie Rose:

But you see reports today of increasing strife between Zardari, the leader of Pakistan and his opposition, warning some people that it might become Musharraf all over again.

Michael Mullen:

Sure. We're watching -- obviously watching this lawyer's march very carefully and I have been engaged from the standpoint of understanding what's going on there, and I know that there are people concerned that this could degenerate into a situation that could very possibly generate a crisis which may cause actions to be taken on the part of the military. I don't think that possibility is out there as a high probability right now, but certainly, it's a concern. And I've interacted with my counterpart in Pakistan upwards of 10 times -- I mean I have been with him upwards of 10 times over the last year. He is committed to a civilian government. He is committed to the democracy that's there. In my view, the last thing in the world he wants to do is become -- is take over as President Musharraf did.

Charlie Rose:

He wants to stay out of politics.

Michael Mullen:

He does want to stay out of politics. He also wants to do the right thing for Pakistan. He's in a very, very tough spot. He also knows his country well and so obviously he's paying a lot of attention to this as well as we all are. And I'm just hopeful that this doesn't turn any another crisis in Pakistan.

Charlie Rose:

How do you get the army chief of staff, Kiyani, to take those military forces and use them not in anticipation of conflict with India, but more in pursuit of forces to want to destabilize Pakistan?

Charlie Rose:

Well, first of all, he recognizes that he as an extremist threat in Pakistan. They've lost many, many citizens. And, in fact, there is -- if you look at the suicide bombings which have occurred over the last year or so, they actually move towards -- and a couple of them actually have occurred in Islamabad. So he recognizes there is a serious, extremist terrorist threat inside his country. In fact, his forces have fought very hard this year up in Bajaur, which is -- and Mamund, up in the western border. Clearly, the Mumbai attacks in India put him in a position where he had to focus more on the Indian border. And he has -- he's chief that's got threat coming from both directions. It's very important, and I give President Musharraf and Prime Minister Singh a lot of credit, because they actually detentioned that border during President Musharraf's time. And, in fact, tourism started to flourish. There was trade which started to flourish across that border. And all that got

suspended with Mumbai attacks. So General Kiyani knows what he has to do. He needs to move for troops to the west and he needs to train them in --

Charlie Rose:

And he feels like forces within his government, whether it's ISI or elsewhere who may be responsive to radical elements are under control and are not making -- their loyalty is not divided.

Michael Mullen:

He certainly is aware of the concerns that I have with respect to his intelligence, ISI, and, in fact, that they have -- they were literally created by the government of Pakistan. They have been very attached to many of these extremist organizations. It's my belief that in the long run, they have got to completely cut ties with those in order to really move in the right direction. And that ISI fundamentally has to change its strategic approach which has been clear to focus on India as well as Afghanistan. And I don't believe they can make a lot of progress until that actually occurs. Now, General Kiyani has taken one of his best guys and appointed him as the new director of ISI, General Pasha. I'm encouraged. I've met with General Pasha many times, but recently since he's been appointed. And I'm encouraged with his views and I'm encouraged with how he sees the problem. It's going to take some time to get at it inside ISI.

Charlie Rose:

What do you say to them when you ask this question. You clearly understand that the president is on record as saying that if they have reliable information about high profile terrorists in your -- in Pakistan, you will go after them?

Michael Mullen:

They -- well, General Kiyani specifically is the idea I deal most with, and I think he fully understands that. It's a conversation I've had many times, not just with military leadership, but also the political leadership, that any president of the United States would respond to an attack on US citizens, another attack coming out of the FATA to strike the United States, and any president would have no choice. And so they understand that very clearly. And they don't disagree with that. It makes sense to them. That's certainly a solemn duty that we have here.

Charlie Rose:

But is that not a sensitive political issue in Pakistan?

Michael Mullen:

Sure, it's absolutely sensitive. I think you're at the heart of dealing with the most difficult part of the problems we have there where we have this safe haven in a sovereign country is that is threatening, plotting against Americans and other western countries. And it must be eliminated. Ideally, that would come through the pressure that the Pakistanis bring to eliminate that threat. But what I worry about is if that -- if that kind of attack is consummated, has that kind of effect, that the response that would certainly be generated from that. And what we're working hard on is trying to make sure that doesn't happen.

Charlie Rose:

What's the mission in Afghanistan?

Michael Mullen:

The long term mission in Afghanistan I think is to ensure that the -- that there is not a return to an environment in which the Taliban can return to run that country or an environment in which a safe haven could be created. And what is -- what we are focused on right now is providing protection for the people, providing security for the people. And I really believe in all this that the Afghanistan people are the center of gravity. And that an ability to provide security to them and, in fact, then get them to take security for themselves, take charge of their own security gives us an opportunity to set the conditions for the kind of good government that they need as well as to get the development going, the economy going. But that's a big challenge for us right now. It's a very complex country, so that's where we're focused on right now. That's what General McKiernan as his mission every single day.

Charlie Rose:

What questions do you have about NATO in Afghanistan?

Michael Mullen:

Well, I've got an awful lot of friends in NATO. I've pushed them very hard to provide capabilities, and we've got good friends who have done a lot. I mean, Canada, the Brits, the Dutch, the Italians, many countries who've been out there on point and, in fact, have lost people in harm's way as well. But there are a large group of requirements in Afghanistan. We need police trainers, and there are plenty of countries in Europe that do that exceptionally well. We need individuals not in the military who could take care of training ministries at all levels. We need development experts, whether it's in agriculture or other industries that would apply in that part of the world -- or, I'm sorry, in that country. So we need a lot of help across a full spectrum of capabilities, not just the military side.

Charlie Rose:

Do you believe it's possible to deal with the Taliban? To negotiate with the Taliban?

Michael Mullen:

I think that's something that would be determined way down the road. I think in any counter-insurgency if you're successful, you get to a point where there's got to be some kind of reconciliation. But we're not at that point right now. We're not even close to it with respect to the Taliban, so that's something I'll leave for consideration at a point a considerable distance down the road at this point.

Charlie Rose:

The president said in Afghanistan, we're not winning. Are the Taliban winning?

Michael Mullen:

I said last September we're not winning, but I think we can, and in the counter-insurgency, if you're not winning, you're losing, by definition. So in that sense, certainly, they've increased their capability. They have run over the last year much more complex attacks. They have generated a significant rise in the level of violence, and they're starting to turn the people back towards them. The feedback I get from many of the Afghans now is that while not a choice, it's a place to go if they're the ones who are going to either run the place or provide security, or both. So that is a real concern right now. So they've gotten better, they've had some successes, and that's one of the reasons that we've asked for these troops to go in, because we need to turn that around. I think we can, but it's going to take troops to do that. And I expect, Charlie, I expect the violence level to go up. I expect our casualties to go up. We don't do this without understanding those risks as well, but it's also the mission that we're given. In order to provide that security, our courageous young people are going to do this.

Charlie Rose:

What does the history of Afghanistan tell you about trying to play a role in the future of Afghanistan?

Michael Mullen:

The history of Afghanistan is certainly one that has many empires, if you will, or many other countries, not the least of whom are the Russians, the Brits, et cetera, have failed. The one thing that I kind of focus on when I think about this is we're not there to occupy Afghanistan. We're not there to run Afghanistan. We're there, and actually one of our big success stories has been to train and develop and let the Afghan security forces, particularly the army, take the lead. And when that -- when we've gotten to that point, we're leaving. There's no question in my mind. But certainly, the history is very instructive. It's also, in that sense we've got to pay attention to it. But I really believe our motive is different, and therefore, the outcome can be different.

Charlie Rose:

And who do we have to get on our side to achieve our objectives?

Michael Mullen:

I think we've got to get the people of Afghanistan on our side.

Charlie Rose:

The Pashtun and whoever else we can get.

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely, there's a big, big Pashtun center of gravity here, on both sides of the Duran line, both in Pakistan and Afghanistan, and I think that's a part of -- but I think it's got to be all the people of Afghanistan, including the leaders, the local leaders who hold so much sway in all that goes on. So that gets to the governance piece. And the people of Afghanistan are anxious to see their government deliver for them, and, you know, again, at every single level. So I think that's why those pieces are so important, but you can't start if they're not secure.

Charlie Rose:

Okay, so back to NATO, I mean others have said this is a test of NATO, what happens in Afghanistan, of their relevance. That's number one. Number two, you've got a conference coming up in which NATO countries will be coming. You've invited Russia, you invited China, and you've invited Iran.

Michael Mullen:

This is the conference on the 31st.

Charlie Rose:

Right.

Michael Mullen:

This is actually being run by -- out of the UN. Kai Ida, who is a special representative to Afghanistan, is running it.

Charlie Rose:

But it's an effort to get everybody involved. That's the point.

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely.

Charlie Rose:

And to make people understand that what happens to Afghanistan is in their interests.

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely, and there is great focus on this, and it's being described as a conference with a focus on what we all can do from an integrated standpoint, but also what individual countries may have to offer to help us solve this problem. So, that's the purpose of it. I think it's on the 31st of this month. The purpose of the conference is to do that, and it is this constant focus on, you know, America cannot do this alone. We need help. This is a -- in many ways, this is a global issue because of the challenge that we have in particular in that safe haven, that literally affects us all from the long term standpoint if it goes south there.

Charlie Rose:

I want to go to Iran, but first Iraq. There has been an uptick in violence.

Michael Mullen:

There has.

Charlie Rose:

What's going on?

Michael Mullen:

Well, many of us have spoken for a long time that Al-Qaeda is not defeated. They are greatly diminished. We think we're going to see these spikes in violence over time, and what you've seen in the last few days is exactly that. That said, we still believe that we're headed in the right direction here, and that the overall trends continue in the right direction. This is going to continue to happen to some degree. And the other thing that comes out of these particular bombings is the Iraqi security forces are very intent on leading and handling the security, and so they recognize -- and I'm very encouraged by this -- they recognize that this is every bit as much if not more so their challenge as opposed to ours. So I, clearly we expect for this to happen on occasion. We're not settled. We still are in a tough fight up in Mosul. That's where some of these have been focused lately, and until that really is tamped down, and I think that's going to take us a few more months, we're going to see more up there.

Charlie Rose:

But so far, what came out of Anwar province, the awakening, which meant that certain Sunni groups were turning against Al-Qaeda, had held.

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely.

Charlie Rose:

And it's leading to some political conversations and cooperation that are essential.

Michael Mullen:

Right. There's the turning the security over to the Iraqis, but the dominant issue in Iraq over the next year and a half as we continue to come down is going to be the policy.

Charlie Rose:

Okay, but if the policies don't work, could it upset the withdrawal schedule?

Michael Mullen:

There's been a lot of politics that I've seen over the last year to get us to where we are right now, and in that, somehow, Iraqi politics gets to the point where it makes a decision which is supportive of where we're headed right now. I mean, I could do what-if's, and there are certainly possibilities. I don't think the probabilities are very high right now, but I'm also not very good at predicting. One of the things that we try to do with the decision the president made, or one of the things the president has allowed the commander on the ground to do is have a significant number of forces this year through the elections which are in December, which we think is the highest risk time, say a couple of months before to a couple of months after, and then really accelerate the draw-down at that point in time, and we did that specifically because elections are so important. And yet, in the most recent elections, the Iraq security forces really did well to make sure that they were secure.

Charlie Rose:

But you're going to leave how many troops there even after the president has completed the withdrawal of combat troops?

Michael Mullen:

The mission changes in August, the end of August 2010.

Charlie Rose:

And you'll leave how many troops there?

Michael Mullen:

Approximately 50,000. That is actually what he said, is 35,000 to 50,000, and it's very important that General Odierno's drawdown be able to meet some level of capability, which he has described as advising and assisting although some counterterrorism combat operations will be there, and we've got to be able to protect ourselves and these state department employees and citizens that we have there. So there's going to be a transition force of about that size, and I'm sure as that goes well after that, you know, we'll come down as rapidly as we can. There's also a deadline about a year later where, under the current agreement with Iraq, we have to be out of Iraq -- all U.S. forces have to be out of Iraq at the end of 2011.

Charlie Rose:

But Tom Ricks and others have pointed out the fact that all combat troops have left, you're still going to have 50,000 troops there, and they -- whatever you say may still be engaged in combat and they still suffer casualties.

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely. Absolutely. Anybody, as it is today, and I think will be there, then, is our young men and women who have done so well, will be -- continue to be in harm's way. So this is always a possibility that there will be casualties as well as some combat operations.

Charlie Rose:

You assume that by 2011, all American forces will be out of Iraq?

Michael Mullen:

That's my assumption right now, because that's the agreement we have with Iraq. That doesn't preclude -- and I think Iraq will have to initiate any change to that. It doesn't preclude them from doing that. But our planning assumption right now is by December 31, 2011 we're all out.

Charlie Rose:

Staying in the broader Middle East which you have said is your highest priority. Iran. Are the differences within the Pentagon about where Iran is on achieving enough uranium to make a bomb?

Michael Mullen:

No. There aren't any differences?

Charlie Rose:

But there was apparently the look of a difference?

Michael Mullen:

I think that's fair. When I was asked that question a couple of weeks ago, the message I wanted to have out there was that, in fact, which is what I thought the reporter had asked me, do they have enough low grade uranium. And that's why I said yes, because they're certainly just about there. And in terms of the timeline, you know, I'm in agreement with both Blair and Secretary of Defense that the timeline hasn't changed.

Charlie Rose:

What is that timeline?

Michael Mullen:

It's sort of 2010 to 2015 is kind of the timeline that's out there.

Charlie Rose:

In which they will have the capacity and enough uranium to make a nuclear weapon?

Michael Mullen:

Correct.

Charlie Rose:

At least one.

Michael Mullen:

I fundamentally believe that the Iranians are on a path to do that. I've had that belief for some time. And I think they will continue to move in that direction. That's about the timeline that we're in right now. And almost halfway through 2009, 2010 isn't very far away.

Charlie Rose:

On the diplomatic end, do you know what strategy will get them to give up in a goal?

Michael Mullen:

No. I don't. I'm encouraged. This is a country we haven't had any relationship with since 1979. I'm encouraged by the initiative on the part of the president to try to establish a dialogue, to try to engage, and to see that. And I am actually hopeful that that would, in fact, succeed in doing that. I don't think we can do it alone, certainly U.S. is going to be a leader in that regard. But I'm hopeful it would have that effect. On the other hand, if it doesn't have that effect, certainly that's been, you know -- that's -- that will be something that we'll all understand a lot better. And how the Iranians are going to respond to, that it's very difficult for me to tell.

Charlie Rose:

At some point, the U.S. military may have to operate on the assumption they will get a nuclear weapon.

Michael Mullen:

Right. Absolutely. And I think all of that is tied to, you know, policy decisions in terms of what would happen when they do. I think physical be very destabilizing in that part of the world. Their neighbors are extremely concerned about it. I worry about the proliferation which would occur. Once they get to that point -- so it's not just about Iran having it. It's about what they do with it. And if other parts of the world are an example, neighborhoods, when they get one, they start to proliferate. So it really ups the -- I think dramatically increases the danger in the region. And I think more danger in that region is more danger globally.

Charlie Rose:

And there is no country that may be threatened by Iran that wouldn't want its own nuclear weapon.

Michael Mullen:

Well, you worry about that. Certainly. Certainly.

Charlie Rose:

Is there possible a grand bargain here that some people speculate with Iran? They'll give up this if a whole range of other things take place?

Michael Mullen:

I would say certainly it's possible. That's really not for me to speculate much on. That's really for the diplomats and for if political leadership to work their way through. And certainly there have been views out there that that might be possible, but I think we've got to get to a point where we've established some kind of commitment on both sides to discuss this, to have a dialogue, to engage, and see where we go from there.

Charlie Rose:

Some people say that there are two schools of thought within this government and previous American governments, that we have not made a choice between wanting to change the regime or change the behavior.

Michael Mullen:

Right. Right. I certainly to, you know, how this engagement would go with respect to that. And focus on will their behavior change? And I honestly don't know. It goes back to we haven't a relationship with them for a long time. A lot of people can interpret this. Until we actually get into some kind of discussion with them, we won't know.

Charlie Rose:

You, I assume, look at the same information that the Israelis look at, and they come to very different conclusions.

Michael Mullen:

Actually, I have been with my Israeli counterpart a number of times, and by and large we see it the same way.

Charlie Rose:

You do?

Michael Mullen:

Absolutely. Absolutely.

Charlie Rose:

So they don't think that the Iranians are closer to a nuclear weapon than you do?

Michael Mullen:

We are in agreement and have been for, oh, if better part of the last six months or so.

There was a time that we weren't, but we've actually worked pretty hard to understand where we both are and so I think generally, we're in agreement. But the Israelis for sure believe that the Iranians are on a path and are going to develop nuclear weapons.

Charlie Rose:

But they don't think they're closer than we do. As far as you know in your conversations.

Michael Mullen:

Not by a significant degree.

Charlie Rose:

What happens -- what's the scenario if they launch an attack?

Michael Mullen:

What I worry about on -- in terms of an attack on Iran, is in addition to the immediate effect, the effect of the attack. It's the unintended consequences. It's the further destabilization in the region. It's how they would respond. We have lots of Americans who live in that region who are -- who are under the threat envelope right now, capability that Iran has across the gulf. So I worry about the responses and I worry about it escalating in ways that we couldn't predict. So that kind of option generates a much higher level of risk in terms of outcomes in the region and it really concerns me.

Charlie Rose:

Do we get any help from our friends, Russians on this?

Michael Mullen:

The possibility is there. Certainly there are diplomatic signs between President Obama's, our administration now is in engagement with Russia, and we do have common interests there. And I think in our negotiations with Russia, our relationship with Russia, focusing on those common interests are -- is very important. And one of those interests is clearly

Iran. And having a peaceful outcome there. We've got common interest in Afghanistan. We've got -- so we've got some areas that I think bode -- could bode very positively in terms of where we go with respect to Russia in the future.

Charlie Rose:

Could we fight a war on a third front?

Michael Mullen:

We have the capacity to do it. But we are stretched. My ground forces are very stressed, very worn. You and you were talking before the show started. Four deployments now, long deployments in many, many cases. Done exceptionally well, very resilient, but we're very pressed. On the other hand, we've got a very strong reserve, strategic reserve in our air force and our navy, and, in fact, that's a part of the world, a maritime part of the world where the emphasis would certainly be on those two forces.

It's not like the Navy and the Air Force haven't been working hard to support what we're doing, but there is plenty of capacity there.

Charlie Rose:

Where would it most likely happen?

Michael Mullen:

Where?

Charlie Rose:

A breakout of conflict.

Michael Mullen:

Well, I mean in terms of -- you mean the whole --

Charlie Rose:

In other words, you needed to redeploy forces somewhere, if you needed few add American forces somewhere rapidly, where would it most likely be, if you look at what you think about every day?

Michael Mullen:

Well, actually what I think about every day --

Charlie Rose:

Forces that are there.

Michael Mullen:

Not just that. The ones I'm in, and, in fact, there is a need to add forces to Afghanistan, specifically. And then I think the probability of a significant ground war, somewhere else in the world is really pretty slim. So again, not perfectly predictive in many cases, but those probabilities are pretty small, so I think if we had something -- another conflict, it

would be principally our air forces and our navy, and at the same time, even given that, given that we're fighting two right now, it would be a pretty tough stretch.

Charlie Rose:

The North Koreans are going to launch a missile for sure.

Charlie Rose:

Does that trouble you?

Michael Mullen:

Well, it certainly destabilizing in that part of the world, That part of the world's had a recent history of, you know, being reasonably stable. It's a very important part of the world, and I would hope that North Korea would take steps which don't destabilize. That said, the leader of North Korea's got a pretty significant track record to stir things up and has declared his intent to launch a satellite here in the next --

Charlie Rose:

Satellite, missile, satellite.

Michael Mullen:

Well, true, but this is also a satellite that's basically boosted in what is, in a longer development program, an intercontinental ballistic missile, and so it gives him the opportunity down the road if he starts to succeed to, you know, put -- you don't know what you have on top. Now, it's a satellite; down the road it could be a nuclear weapon. So what he's done or at least what his declared intention is is certainly of great concern to all of us.

Charlie Rose:

China. What is China's ambition from a military standpoint?

Michael Mullen:

Not as clear as I would like it to be in terms of understanding it. I think their strategic intent has been somewhat clouded in recent years. They just increased their defense budget again, fairly dramatically. We know they're investing in some very high end capabilities, submarines, the kinds of strike missiles, et cetera, which are -- which have an awful lot of potential. Generally that's focused. Regionally, certainly off its, not just its first island chain, on the -- from the peaceful view it is to develop security capability which allows them to take care of their needs, but their strategic intent is something that we haven't been able to pry out of them that I can see.

Charlie Rose:

But they're -- Admiral Blair said that some alarming increases in harassment.

Michael Mullen:

Well, we had an incident just this last Sunday, which was the most significant incident we've had at sea, when we had a number of fishing vessels aggressively close in on --

and when I say “close in on,” I’m talking about 25 to 40 feet -- to one of our vessels, which was in international waters, fully compliant with international law, and there was no reason to do that. And it bordered -- it certainly -- those of us that looked at it thought it was an irresponsible action, certainly on the part of someone that’s spent a lot of my time at sea, no compliance with the international norm with respect to that.

Charlie Rose:

I’m sure when you sit down with the Chinese military leaders, as you do, that you ask a question, “What is your intent?” What do they say?

Michael Mullen:

They’re very concerned about this economic zone, which goes out to 200 miles, and certainly that was what has been part of the public statement with respect to how China’s responded. But we have every right to be in those waters. Those are not territorial waters. Territorial waters only go out to 12 miles, 12 nautical miles. The economic zone goes out to 200, and any country in the world has a right to be in the those waters.

Charlie Rose:

Is there a debate within our government as to what their intent is?

Michael Mullen:

We don’t think -- I don’t think, and I think generally we’re in agreement that they certainly don’t intend for, that this incident would escalate into something that would, that could be much worse. And, in fact, I think both countries are working pretty hard right now to make sure that doesn’t happen. But what Admiral Blair said in testimony is absolutely right. It’s the most serious incident since the P3 was knocked down in 2001. And so we worry about that, and that get backs to sorting out this intent, which isn’t always that clear.

Charlie Rose:

There is this, now, more than ever: the economic crisis. The president has spoken about this, Admiral Blair has spoken about this, and you have spoken about it, how it has become a national security issue.

Michael Mullen:

Right. I believe that governments who are providing for their people and whose economies rapidly go away are going to be put in a much more difficult position to provide for them. And there are strong governments and weak governments. I’ll use a country we already talked about. The economy in Pakistan is in very, very difficult shape. It was before the intensity of this financial crisis hit. So that’s another big challenge for the civilian leadership in Pakistan to deal with. There’s instability that gets generated with respect to resources drying up, because people cannot be provided for, and there are reports of demonstrations and riots from various parts of the world where there are shortages tied specifically to this crisis.

Charlie Rose:

I have one specific example: Russia using gas, which is headed for Europe, and it's power over that gas as a political weapon.

Michael Mullen:

Right, and I think they've certainly demonstrated that.

Charlie Rose:

And so what do we do? What's the strategy to deal with it?

Michael Mullen:

Well, I think it's -- the front end of this is it's for the Europeans to deal with, and certainly many of them recognize that, that Russia has done that, or certainly has done that very recently. And that's a concern with where is Russia going? I mean, we talked about common interests, shared interests that we have in Russia. We certainly have differences with respect to using something like that as a weapon, and they have worked hard in recent years to put themselves in a position to have that kind of influence and they clearly are.

Charlie Rose:

Interesting when you talk about the Russians, is our own missile defense facility. Is there some bargain possible, and if it takes place, does it worry you that it might not be there and it becomes a bargaining chip?

Michael Mullen:

I think it's, certainly it's an issue that's under review by President Obama and his administration, and I certainly -- and I wouldn't predict or speak to how that might come out.

Charlie Rose:

But do we need it?

Michael Mullen:

The system itself is really focused on ballistic missiles which threaten Europe. Now there's certainly been debate about whether that's true or not. I just know technically, that's what the system can do. The Russians have seen those systems as a threat because they're on their border. And actually, if I were in Moscow, I can certainly look in that direction --

Charlie Rose:

Even though we say they're only about Iran.

Michael Mullen:

Missiles that are incoming as opposed to missiles that might threaten them, but if I were in Moscow, I certainly -- you know, I have an understanding that I might see it that way as well. So I think it's important we work our way through that, and I think this review

and the relationship and the part of the commitment, I think, on the part of President Obama to take a look at this will sort out exactly what will happen.

Charlie Rose:

Latin America -- Mexico, specifically. There was an announcement today of perhaps putting more National Guard or some military troops on the border.

Michael Mullen:

Right

Charlie Rose:

What are the issues in Mexico?

Michael Mullen:

I was in Mexico City last week, and I met with the military leadership there, specifically. And I've been to Mexico City -- I've been to Mexico a few times, but this is obviously -- I hadn't been there in a little while, and it was really to, I think, focus on our relationship from the military to military standpoint. And as is always the case when I go to visit some country, I understand, one, how they see things better, and one of the big takeaways for me last week was President Calderón has really, I think, very courageously taken on these drug cartels. And we watch this, many of us watched this in Colombia with President Uribe over the last few years. President Calderón has also done that. That has, in fact, generated a lot of the violence. It is a very tough fight. And it's going to be a tough fight for some time. He's essentially appointed his military to do this, because of the corruption challenge that he has in his police world. We've got a fairly significant effort -- we've had for some time with Border Police and counternarcotics, and so what you hear -- I think what you heard the president talk about today were what possibilities might be. There are certainly no decisions, looking at options and it's spilling over into our own country.

Charlie Rose:

But could Mexico become a failed state?

Michael Mullen:

No, I don't believe that this crisis will generate anything close to a failed state with respect to Mexico.

Charlie Rose:

They can do what they did in Colombia with the right kind of support?

Michael Mullen:

I think the leadership and the support and clearly the dedication from which I saw, and from their military leadership, as they talked about getting at this particular crisis.

Charlie Rose:

Talk for a moment about American strategy. Do we have in the military in a definable way a grand strategy as to how we see the American role in the world?

Michael Mullen:

The grand strategy comes from the top, and that's --

Charlie Rose:

From the president.

Michael Mullen:

Right. And a new president will, in time, sometime in the first year, 18 months, generate a national security strategy, and it is from that strategy that Secretary Gates, who actually issued a national defense strategy several months ago, that's tied to that national security strategy. And, in fact, there's a military strategy that comes under that. And so we have a national defense strategy right now, and strategy which looks at the world and looks at the risks and I am sure will have a national security strategy from President Obama in due time.

Charlie Rose:

I'm interested in the larger question of how that strategy may be changing and evolving, and subject to new issues, as we have talks about, like the economic crisis.

Michael Mullen:

I think that clearly will be integrated into any emerging strategy from a national security standpoint. What Secretary Gates and I are trying to do is rebalance our military forces to focus more on the unconventional warfare, the irregular warfare. We've got to have a balance of both conventional forces, high and low end, as well as unconventional forces. And we -- and that pendulum is moving towards the unconventional but it's not over far enough.

Charlie Rose:

When we say we can't do it alone, would you have said in speeches and what the president has said, what do we mean? What are the ramifications of we can't do it alone?

Michael Mullen:

I think the political relationships, the diplomatic relationships, the relationships between countries who see things the same way are absolutely vital to succeed in a place like Afghanistan. You spoke earlier, I think Afghanistan is a relevance issue for NATO. If NATO doesn't succeed in Afghanistan, I don't think NATO has much of a future, for example. And that's all tied to the political relationships that obviously are overarching in this military alliance in which we have. And I think that applies globally. So the relationship building, the global connection, no better example of being connected in the crisis we're in right now financially, are growing in importance and those are overarching. How you fit in the security requirements, the military requirements, they come under that.

Charlie Rose:

In terms of the men and women who have been fighting in Iraq and in Afghanistan, how are they going to be different as military leaders?

Michael Mullen:

We are probably the most significant difference that I see, is a -- increasing transparency in how we are -- how we see our military missions. An increasing collaboration. An increasing requirement to reach out behind governments. To commercial entities. To non government organizations. In the missions that we have for the future. I think they already are much more globally focused. They're much more culturally focused. They see the world in many different ways than the time when I came up. And I think all of that is critical in terms of how they will grow. I also think that we, as a military, have to focus heavily on retaining the right to young combat leaders. We have the most combat hardened force we've had in our history, and retention of those young leaders is absolutely vital to a vibrant military for our future.

Charlie Rose:

Do you worry about cyberspace as a field of engagement?

Michael Mullen:

It's an emerging, growing, great concern that we all have. And it has -- while the potential is, I think, exceptionally large on the downside, we have very few that really understand what that potential is, and really understand the technology. And I think we have to do a much better job educating ourselves and addressing this issue.

Charlie Rose:

What's the threat?

Michael Mullen:

The threat runs from nation states to terrorists --

Charlie Rose:

To criminal --

Michael Mullen:

To criminal hackers. They're out there, and actually, we're being attacked every single day.

Charlie Rose:

Why are you most optimistic and why are you most pessimistic?

Michael Mullen:

I'm most optimistic in my position as a leader of our military because of the young men and women who are serving. And they who have done so much for our country and who serve so well and carry out their missions in ways that many of us a few years ago -- because of the size of the challenge, we just -- we develop on them and we have been

incredibly successful because of them. And I see them all the time, and is their families. And they are the best I have absolutely ever seen. So that gets me to my desk every single day in terms of what's positive about where I am.

Charlie Rose:
And most pessimistic?

Michael Mullen:
I'm most pessimistic about what's going on in Afghanistan and Pakistan. I am extremely concerned about that continuing to go in a negative direction. And particularly in Pakistan where it continues to deteriorate very, very slowly under a political leadership which is very challenged pause of the totality of the crisis there.

Charlie Rose:
And it's so connected to Pakistan.

Michael Mullen:
Actually, that is Pakistan. But I mean they are very, very much connected. And Pakistan is a country with nuclear weapons. It's 165 million people and should we move to a point where somehow there is a theocratic government there with nuclear weapons, that's something that keeps me up.

Charlie Rose:
Two last questions. Number one, you have talked in previous conversations with me about soft power. Is that -- is there increasing reliance on soft power in the military attitude of the American government today?

Michael Mullen:
Yes. Because of what we've learned in terms of --

Charlie Rose:
It makes a difference in the hearts and minds of people?

Michael Mullen:
Absolutely. And so many of us believe that and our capacity is limited with respect to that right now, although I am hopeful, based on what certainly President Obama has laid out, as his intent, as he did today, to involve all the elements of national power. And it's the treasury department, it's the commerce department, all those things are very much a part of where we need to be as a nation and what the military needs to support, not lead.

Charlie Rose:
Is there anything you think the military needs that it doesn't have?

Michael Mullen:
We're -- I mean what I need right now probably more than anything else is to -- obviously we continue to focus on these missions. What I think an awful lot about, I need some

more time at home after deployment. That's just a function of the resources that we have to deploy, the length of time they're there, and the requirement, the numbers that are there right now. So I'm actually very hopeful that as we come down in Iraq, and I think we'll have a limited number of forces in Afghanistan. I don't see us moving to a point where there is the same number of forces we've had in Iraq and Afghanistan. So -- and we're building the Army and if Marine Corps. In the next 18 to 24 months, I think we'll be able to build some time at home. I don't have that right now. And I need that.

Charlie Rose:

Thank you for coming.

Michael Mullen:

Thanks, Charlie.

Charlie Rose:

Admiral Michael Mullen is Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He is the man who advises the president. Thank you for joining us. See you next time.